

## Innovative Character of a National ESP Curriculum

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*Innovation is an idea, object or practice perceived as new by an individual or individuals, which is intended to bring about improvement, in relation to desired objectives, which is fundamental in nature and which is planned and deliberate.*

Audrey Nicholls

#### Summary

The new National ESP Curriculum is analysed as an innovation viewed from a macro level /i.e. concerning fundamental aspects of ESP teaching, learning and assessment/. The article highlights some latest methodological developments and principles the Curriculum should be based on.

Any curriculum model is an expression of a particular ideology and language teaching is no more immune to the influence of such ideologies than any other subject [1, 198]. Dramatic changes of ideological priorities of our society in the last decade, Ukraine's move towards its integration into European economic and educational space necessitates the revision of values and beliefs which determine very profoundly aims, methods, content and evaluation, the four basic elements of any language curriculum in general and ESP one in particular.

The latest initiatives of Ministry of Education and Science, TESOL and IATEFL events demonstrated ESP players' understanding of the urgent need of cardinal decisions in this area and their readiness to participate in a developing of a new ESP curriculum. A working team comprising eleven lectures from the eight higher educational institutions was formed to develop a Baseline study and to design a curriculum.

The National ESP Curriculum design can be regarded as an instance of developing and implementing innovation. Innovation is viewed from two different perspectives: a macro view, which sees the innovation as concerning fundamental aspects of the organization and micro view, which looks at innovation as being concerned with one element within a broader context. [4: 178]. In this article I'll focus on the curriculum viewed from a *macro* level, where we have the kind of innovation involved in the ESP major policy review and in which the aims, content, methods and forms of evaluation of a national ESP teacher System is redefined.

The innovative character of the New National ESP Curriculum stems from the pioneering nature of the Common European Framework of Reference from which it derives and from the principles it should be based on. The Curriculum is based on the successes of - and takes into account the flaws which have existed in - Ukrainian EFL/ESP teaching and learning practice. It will reflect the latest national

and international methodological development, such as learner - and learning-centred approaches, communicative language teaching and learning, task-based and project-based approaches, etc. The New Curriculum will be a synergistic document incorporating the best from international and national language teaching and learning theory and practice.

It should thus be based on the following principles:

- *Internationalism and plurilingualism*

The new National Curriculum will be a document with an international orientation, promoting the concept of European citizenship. It will provide students with a solid foundation of learning and open up international professional opportunities to them. A plurilingual approach emphasizes the fact that an individual's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples. The learner builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact [1; 4].

- *Democracy and equality*

If it is agreed that all languages and cultures in the 'House of Europe' (and outside) are equal and that no language or culture will be discriminated against, the new National ESP Curriculum must aim at creating interest in the cultures of European neighbours and developing democratic citizenship and an attitude of openness, tolerance and respect for 'otherness' and difference. As a consequence, in the European context, the new Curriculum will aim not only at developing pragmatic skills, but also comprise the socio-cultural background of the community which learners are to function in. Democratisation of language teaching and learning ensures that all students will have equal opportunity and access to quality education irrespective of their social and educational background. The new Curriculum will provide Higher Educational Institutions nationwide with a generative framework within which they will be able to organize quality language teaching/learning, which will enable learners to satisfy their communicative needs.

- *Transparency and Flexibility*

It will be a flexible document incorporating a set of common features, which will necessitate tailoring ESP syllabuses to meet diverse learners' and teachers' needs. It can be applied, with necessary adaptations, to specific situations and needs. It will be capable of further extension and refinement, a continuous evolution in response to the experience of use. It will be a positively formulated, user-friendly document of non-prescriptive character, with a clear description of language proficiency related to professional qualifications to make it recognizable and comprehensible within Ukraine and across Europe.

- *Plurality.*

It should take into account the diversity of learners' needs according to age, learning purposes and contexts, and background (i.e. create a solid foundation

for developing appropriate distinctive ESP syllabuses for learners of various specialisms), whilst ensuring mutual recognition of all syllabuses and continuity between different educational institutions, sectors, regions and countries. It will value the full range of the learner's language and intercultural competence and experience, regardless of whether these were acquired within or outside formal education. The new document will allow the creation of syllabuses at various levels of complexity. It will offer a framework within which teaching can be diversified with respect to target competence levels, types of competences, types of discourse to be mastered, timing, etc. This plurality of ESP courses, competences and levels is the basis on which plurilingualism can be organized.

- *Integration.*

There are two domains in which the New ESP Curriculum will achieve integration: language learning and content.

- The new ESP Curriculum will shift the emphasis from knowledge as isolated constructs to the notion of curriculum content standing in a necessary and natural interrelationship. It will reflect a change in educational philosophy that considers language teaching as a homogeneous, diversified education in language. Language learning is seen as acquisition of knowledge and integrated skills as they interact in real-life situations.
- The new document will aim at developing integrated skills and be designed to cohere as closely as possible with the goals and content of the learners' areas of specialism. Integrated teaching of macro-skills will be valid when seen in their natural context of the respective professional settings. The market demand for such skills is illustrated by the growing trend of using English as a medium of instruction. The new Curriculum document will bring about such integration at the level of objectives and teaching methods, and by coordinating syllabuses.

The new ESP curriculum should:

- *be relevant* to the professional needs of learners and societal expectations, and relevant to the target situations in which ESP students will function as specialists.
- *encourage life-long learning and autonomy.* It is obvious that learning a foreign language, especially in the European context, reaches far beyond compulsory education. Since the active use of procedural knowledge ('learning to learn') is the basis for efficient and autonomous life-long learning of languages after school, the development of procedural knowledge is an essential objective within the framework of a the new approach. The National ESP Curriculum will become a tool for promoting learners autonomy and critical awareness of their learning. By focusing on the generic skills of critical thinking, problem solving, presenting ideas, etc., the New ESP Curriculum will help to assess ESP students' language and

intercultural competence, and thereby develop their capacity for independent language learning.

- *follow a modular design.* The ESP Curriculum will be multidimensional (taking account of the different dimensions of the reference framework) and modular in the organization of learning and evolution. This will permit, synchronically (i.e. at a given moment in the learning path) or diachronically (i.e. through differentiated stages along this path), the development and recognition of the plurilingual and pluricultural components. And differentiation of methods of evaluation, working towards modular certification arrangements. [1, 175]. The Curriculum will be a competence-based document, aimed at improving learners' proficiency in a restricted area for a particular purpose and providing continuity, variability and individualization of teaching and learning. Each of the characteristics of language teaching may be given different specifications, which means that an enormous number of practical forms of language teaching may be imagined, capable of developing specific linguistic repertoires and according to learners' specialisms, life plans and needs. The modular approach of the Curriculum helps to introduce key skills and competences into subsequent syllabuses, taking into account the learners' needs, initial and target proficiency levels, and the number of hours allotted for ESP (ELT). Multidimensionality and modularity thus appear as key concepts in developing a sound basis for linguistic diversification in the Curriculum and in assessment.

The above mentioned innovative approaches to ESP curriculum design and its pioneering nature are accordingly to give a hope, that it will have a great chance of success and will satisfy the demand of the day.

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